1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

842 quite explicit, and married couples are supposed to want children. Those few 183 women who admitted to me, confidentially, not wanting children had very high divorce records, while all others conformed to expectations when asked specifically concerning their desire for offspring.

842 Traditionally the Kanuri believe that conception results from simultaneous orgasm during sexual intercourse. This information I got from older men who do not, however, know in any detail when or how often such an event actually takes 843 place. Instead they reason that it has occurred when their wife reports a pregnancy. [842] When a woman is over one month late in a menstrual cycle (a few said forty-five days) conception is suspected, and she begins to buy charms on the market to safeguard a normal gestation. During this initial period the husband and wife, ideally at least, should not speak of the pregnancy to anyone until at least the second menstrual period has been missed, and then only to their very close friends and relatives. Such talk, indeed any excess conversation about the pregnancy, is believed to be dangerous to the course and development of a normal pregnancy. Even during the later stages just before birth only very cryptic references are made by the parents when they refer to the coming event. Pregnancy, like a number of other occa- [984] sions in one's lifetime, is considered a very fragile time, a time when an individual is vulnerable to maliciousness from humans or spirits. Because it is difficult to know about such maliciousness, until after its effects are felt, it is better to avoid mentioning the susceptible circumstances.

[833] Sexual intercourse is continued throughout pregnancy since the Kanuri believe that such activity makes for an easier labor at birth by keeping the passage open and providing fluids for the child and the mother.

Although the Kanuri recognize the pregnancy period of nine months, the woman continues her normal work until the lying-in period is signaled by labor. On the other hand exceptions to the nine-month period occur, and some women claim to have been pregnant for years although no outward sign is visible. This latter condition is referred to as *bənji*, that is to say an embryo that will not come out of the womb. A woman may miss a menstrual cycle once and then become convinced that she has conceived. If her conviction holds she may, after menstruating again, diagnose the condition as a *bənji*. Missing a menstrual period, however, is not absolutely necessary for the diagnosis. Women who spoke of having *bənji* felt that any woman could have one, but they also agreed that in their experience the woman was usually older and either had not given birth for a long time or had had a completely infertile marriage history. Certainly many Kanuri women seem to be barren, and this cultural belief must help to assuage the disappointment of a hopeful but sterile woman. It may also serve to alleviate the loss of womanly role for an older woman who sees herself being replaced in her reproductive functions by her husband's younger wives.

Birth

844 When the woman is about to give birth, she is assisted by her own mother if she is in the vicinity, or her mother-in-law if she is living with her husband's family, and sometimes by a specialist in midwifery. There are stories told about

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

women who give birth by themselves, but invariably people qualify these remarks by saying that such cases are very rare except for illegitimate births where it is more common for the girl to go off by herself and deliver the baby.

Throughout her confinement and for a short time after the birth, a pregnant woman takes many hot baths which are said to aid her by making her healthy and adding to the health of the baby. Her husband prepares for this by setting aside extra stores of firewood in the compound. At the time of birth the woman sits over a large warmed wooden bowl and delivers in the sitting position. When the infant arrives it is washed, then warmed almost continuously by the women in attendance who heat their hands over a dish of hot coals and then press the body of the child gently. Almost immediately there are attempts to have the child feed at the mother's breast. At the same time the placenta is buried in the compound with no ceremony. If it fails to descend, one of the women in attendance hastens to a local religious practitioner or a medicinal expert who gives medicines to bring it down. All adult men, including the husband, are barred from any direct participation in the birth event. Instead they usually pray during the entire birth along with their friends and a religious practitioner who may have been hired especially for this purpose.

During the forty-day confinement period after the birth the woman remains inside the household, and ideally, there should be no sexual intercourse between the spouses. However, almost everyone agreed that this rule was not strictly followed among the ordinary peasant farmers or craftsmen because of the great reliance played on a woman's labor in the compound and in the fields. On the other hand, the first eight days after the birth are universally accepted as a time of strict confinement. After that, factors of wealth, number of wives, the season of the year, rural or urban residence, and personal idiosyncracy determines the length of confinement for any particular woman.

During the first eight days of its life, the baby is referred to as "the little kitten," or "the little stranger." This is considered a time of great susceptibility for the parents and the new-born infant. The parents are expected to maintain very strict adherence to all cultural prescriptions in order to insure the child's safety. Practically no mention of the new baby is made in public, and even its sex is unknown outside the household except for a few very close friends of the family, and these are expected to keep the secret. "Little kitten" is an appropirate term. Cats are highly thought of in Bornu and are the only animals except peacocks that are believed to have the right to enter heaven. Like a kitten the new baby is a welcome addition to the family; and like a kitten it is not really human. If it dies during these first eight days, it is buried unceremoniously, like a pet, in the women's section of the compound with none of the formal rituals given to a normal member of the community.

On the Friday within the eight-day period or several days before, if the child is born on a Friday, two or three kola nuts are sent around to each of the men of the town who are relatives and friends of the parents. Similar presents are sent to the houses of all the important people in the village—the political, judicial, and religious leaders. On the same day, women who are related to the household by ties of kinship, or common membership in the neighborhood, or long-term friendships gather at the mother's compound and begin to prepare food. Some of

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CHAPTER VI

The Life Cycle

121 In the material to follow it is taken for granted that Kamuri culture and society have a perpetuity beyond the individual life span. That is to say, there is a cultural tradition and an ordered social life into which the individual is socialised.

561 As individuals pass through various phases of life in Bornu, they are at any one time identified as occupying one of a serially related set of roles, one for each sex. These are not the [571] only roles occupied by members of the society. Kamuri social organisation is complex and heterogeneous, so that an infant may be a farmer's infant, a blacksmith's, the child of a noble family and so on. However, everyone in Bornu is at one time an infant, a child, an adult or an old person and it is this universal set of serially related roles which is referred to here as the age status system. Although these roles are individually experienced they have their definition in the social life of the individual as he passes from birth to death. Thus, despite the fact that there is a rough correlation between age statuses and the physiological phases of life, a more profound and precise understanding of age statuses can be accomplished through a description of the social roles of developing individuals.

Birth

844 At birth the mother is assisted by a midwife (*sartàma*). Her own mother may be present if she is in the vicinity as well as other women in the compound and neighbouring compounds. The husband must set by a store of firewood which is used for hot baths around the time of parturition and during the forty-day confinement period after birth.

844 after birth. The birth takes place in a sitting position over a warmed wooden bowl. When the infant arrives it is washed and then continually warmed by the female attendants who heat their hands over [853] a dish of hot coals and then press the body of the child. Almost immediately attempts are made to have the infant feed at the mother's breast. The placenta is buried in the compound with no ceremony.

[782] Men are barred from any direct participation in the actual birth process, but usually pray heavily and/or employ a mallam (Koranic teacher-priest) to pray for the successful outcome of the 846 birth. During the forty-day confinement period there should be no [565] sexual intercourse between spouses. Informants stated that strict adherence to the forty-day confinement rule as well as the sexual taboo may vary among the poorer classes where the woman's economic services are more in demand. However, the first eight days after birth are universally accepted as a time of strict confinement and sexual abstinence.

846 858 During the first eight days of life the infant is known as fatu (the little kitten) or kusoto gana (the little stranger) and is referred to when necessary in these terms. This is a strong tabu time for the parents, and they must be sure to maintain all cultural prescriptions to ensure the safety of the infant. Hardly any mention is made in public of the new arrival. Even its sex is unknown except by a few close female friends of the mother who are expected [766] to keep the secret. If it dies during this period, the infant does not receive a proper burial, but is unceremoniously interred in the women's section of the compound.

000 On the Friday within the eight-day period, or several